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DECORATION & FURNITURE



HINTS ON CHURCH EMBROIDERY.

CHURCH embroidery has received much attention at all times, and of late years particularly, and with ever-improving results. Many works of true art have been produced, many also that have fallen lamentably short of that standard.

The general rules for the design and coloring of decorative needlework for our homes, will also apply to that which is intended for the glory of God in the beautifying of His house. This last has narrower limitations, stricter laws of fitness, bonds of symbolism, rules of color, and traditions of style; but a student of art needlework will not find that these stricter laws prevent church work from being beautiful and harmonious; indeed, they will be aids rather than hindrances, while the knowledge of general principles of color and design will be a safeguard against placing vulgar, crude, or tasteless combinations where, in many eyes, they would be not only ugly but irreverent.

Church needlework differs only from secular work in its design, which is subject to the limitations spoken of above, and in its special application, which makes it the highest effort of needle-work. If a faithful apprenticeship has been served to secular work, it is only needful to apply the same principles to suitable designs in order to fit the work for the highest purpose to which it can be devoted. Instead of merely reproducing ancient work, which is often too cramped and archaic to suit modern churches, it will be better to employ the increased skill of modern times in designing work that shall be new and original, and yet within the fitting limits and chastened reserve of ecclesiastical embroidery.

In designing this kind of work there are double reasons why colors should be grave and rich rather than harsh or crude: unity of design and harmony of color take a new and deeper meaning, honesty of workmanship becomes a duty, and a new reason for conventionalism is seen when we remember that we ourselves, when in God's house, lay aside an ordinary and natural demeanor. It may not be amiss to warn the reader against some of the mistakes that are most frequently committed. One of these is the abuse of symbolism, as when symbols are wrongly used or put in wrong places. The most holy signs and names are often seen placed where they will be leaned against, knelt on, or even stood upon; or emblems are seen in positions of the highest dignity which should properly occupy only secondary places.

A more common fault, the result of a more common ignorance, is to suppose that precious materials, excellent workmanship, and even good coloring will atone for the absence of a thoughtful and well-balanced design; this is to endeavor to build without a foundation. A piece of work seen by the writer may be held up as a warning. It was an "antependium," or pulpit frontal, the material of which was cream-white silk. The border was of pale pink roses, with their stems and leaves on a ground of olive green, well treated and well worked. In the centre was a red cross bordered with gold, in harmony with the border, well proportioned, and rightly telling as the principal point. This would have been very good had this been all, and had the white ground been left plain as a relief to the eye, or worked with a diaper to give it increased richness, but it was encumbered with a heavy scroll above the cross, shaded with a cold inharmonious gray, and inscribed with black letters that made the sharpest contrast in the whole work. Below the cross were a large fleur-de-lys and a highly conventionalized rose, both in gold-colored silk, exquisitely worked, but quite out of place, overloading and confusing the design.

Good work may be done for churches by many who are uninstructed in the details of the richer kinds of work;

but they should content themselves with the humbler rather than the more ambitious objects. Besides these last, which from the dignity of their position and the richness of their materials require special skill and undivided attention, there are many articles the decoration of which may be confided to less practised hands. Kneeling-cushions and foot-mats have been partly rescued from the dominion of cross-stitch, and are frequently embroidered or made in applied work of excellent design and color. More seldom, but occasionally, we have seen embroidered colossal hangings and door curtains, which are much more beautiful and valuable than any loom work, upholstery, or the stamped designs most commonly used for these purposes.

To all these articles the rules of design and color, given in earlier articles, will easily be applied, often more easily than in work intended for house decoration, because of the broader and simpler surroundings and equally distributed light of a church; while the varied and constantly changing uses and aspects of an ordinary room multiply the difficulties of arranging forms and colors for its decoration.

PIANO-BACK DECORATIONS.

UPRIGHT pianos are now seldom placed with their backs to the wall as of old; but they are brought out and made to look as attractive as possible. A piano seen the other day had a wreath of blue harebells, with abundance of leaves, worked all round the edge, and in the centre three lines of music, painted in black, four or five inches wide. The material was white crash, and it was tightly stretched over a wooden frame. At each corner was a good-sized medallion, worked round in gold-colored filoselle, and in this was embroidered a musical instrument, such as a harp, violin, trumpet, and flute in shaded brown silks. At the top, in the centre, was a cluster of bells, attached by a red ribbon, hanging different lengths. These were worked in shades of gray. The design was appropriate and effective.

Oriental embroidered stuffs are particularly well suited for draping over the back of a piano. India shawls and Indian chintzes are used in the same way. Sometimes the backs are entirely covered with tightly stretched serge or momie cloth or crash, with a showy pattern in crewels all over. White muslin pieces embroidered in silk and gold and silver—Oriental goods—are perhaps the most fashionable of all, and as these are rarely very large some skill is required to arrange four or five together. The large cranes, and flocks of birds, embroidered in silk and gold thread on satin imported from Japan, look handsome. In England many ladies use their costly China crape shawls thus draped on pianos.

The following is a novel arrangement, which has been successfully adopted: Cut out the size required in white momie cloth or black ribbed serge (both of which are wide materials); lay on at the edge, top and bottom, a strip of red satin sheeting, cut on one side in deep vandykes, measuring some eight or nine inches. These vandykes point toward the centre, and must all be of the same size, and fit in between each other and not directly opposite. The edges are chain-stitched, and cut away, and a herringbone pattern worked all round in red crewel or silk of the same shade as the sheeting. Along the centre of the piano-back, between the two rows of points, an undulating design of ivy leaves should be sketched and worked in red crewels or silk, a few leaves straying away into the spaces between the points. Red in particular is mentioned, because the writer is describing a piano-back at present before her; but this idea can be carried out in any colors, to suit the furniture of the room it is intended for. Brown velvet or velveteen on light blue serge, worked with brown silk, and a design of silk in shaded browns, with a few touches of dark red, or dark red velvet, on a lighter red ground of either momie, or oatmeal cloth, or serge,

worked with gold-colored silk, would look most effective. If still more ornamentation is required, a small pattern could be worked on the points. If the piano is of the ordinary size, about a yard and a half would be sufficient of the material for the two strips of points, splitting it in half, and about the same for the foundation.

WALL PAINT AND PAPER.

THERE are three methods, says an intelligent writer in an English magazine, commonly adopted for covering and decorating wall spaces—plain color in paint, paper, or distemper; patterns in paper, textile fabrics, or paint; and panelling. If the first method be employed, all the interest of the wall-surfaces is made to depend upon color. There can be no objection to this; a plain surface of color may be a beautiful thing provided it be adapted for its purpose. But unfortunately it is in rare exceptions only that we find walls of suitable tones. Those most usually used are pale green and yellowish drab. It will be said that these are harmless; and, to a certain extent, this defence is true. But it must be borne in mind that the harmless is not a very high ideal to aspire to, and that it is this inability in most of us to make our walls better than harmless that drives us to seek relief in vast-sized mirrors or other coarse decorations to give some life to our rooms. If we are fortunate enough to possess good pictures the problem is simple. All we have to do is to paint, paper, or distemper the walls with such a tint as shall form a good background, without interfering with the pictures. A rich brownish green will be found one of the best for this purpose. If, however, we have no pictures, or very few, we must depend on the beauty of our wall-decorations themselves. Now, if we call to mind the colors that we have seen on the walls in our friends' houses, is there any one among them that ever gave us an even momentary feeling of interest or pleasure? Some, as we said before, are harmless, that is to say, entirely uninteresting; but for the most part they are actually aggressive by their extreme crudeness. There is one, for instance, very much like that of lavender kid gloves, that is used often in distemper and paint, and mixed with pure white or white and gold in papers. The effect is one of astonishing repulsiveness. It possesses no brilliancy, no depth, no warmth, no interest or beauty of any kind. It is unsuitable for pictures, and clashes with almost every tint that is brought near to it.

The only thing that can be done in this matter is to appeal to every one's own taste as far as possible, and to try and make them exercise their judgment. Do not let us be content, on the one hand, with gloominess and dulness; let us avoid with horror, on the other hand, all crudeness and mere showiness. Let us be careful that the color chosen shall be one not merely beautiful in small quantities, as for instance scarlet or bright blue, but suitable to covering large spaces, and sufficiently quiet to be a permanent rest to the eyes.

When wall-papers printed in patterns are used, there are further considerations which should guide our choice. It should be borne in mind, however, that although in these cases more than one color is employed, yet there is a general effect of harmonious blending of tone together which should be sought after, an effect best seen at such a distance that the pattern ceases to be very distinct. This general effect is analogous to one tint, and should be considered in the same light. Many papers when viewed from certain distances give undue prominence to one particular feature, owing to its color not being in proper harmony with those of the other features of the design; and the constant repetition of the pattern over the wall-surface often causes the prominent features to be arranged in lines and figures in themselves unpleasing, though all the lines and figures of the design unpeated may be faultless. Before a wall-paper is chosen, therefore, care should be taken that two or three breadths are placed side by side

in order to detect this secondary pattern, if it exists. Exactly the same effect may be produced without prominence in color by the unequal distribution of the design. Supposing, for instance, it is printed light on a dark ground, and owing to this fault the pattern is thicker in some places than in others, then the thick parts viewed from a short distance will make little masses of light, and the thin parts little masses of dark color, which may make on a large surface a secondary pattern of unpleasing appearance.

But besides the production of general effect at such a distance that the primary design cannot be distinctly seen, we have to consider the latter itself, the curves of its lines, and the beauty of its elementary features. It is, of course, impossible to discuss all the infinite variety of forms that wall-paper patterns have assumed, but there are certain classes of them about which something may be said. The first of these classes is that in which natural objects, flowers, leaves, and birds, are used in what is called an unconventional manner, that is, drawn on the paper as the artist would draw them were he simply making studies from nature. Now, even supposing that it were possible at a considerable cost to reproduce exactly the illustrations of a first-rate work on botany or ornithology, such a design would be eminently unsuited to its place. Not only, however, would it be unsuitable, it would be intrinsically bad; it would lack the first element of artistic design, arrangement. But it may be said that, in all patterns that repeat themselves in the way in which wall-papers of necessity must, there must be *some* arrangement. This is true; but the fact only makes the want of arrangement in the subordinate parts more conspicuous by contrast with the formality of the main features. For instance, in a pattern made of little bunches of flowers, red and blue and yellow, at the angles of a diamond-shaped trellis-work of gilt lines, the flowers which compose the bunch may be natural, but not the bunch itself, nor the placing of bunches at regular intervals. It is, in fact, absurd to talk of naturalism on a wall-paper at all; at best we can only produce but a feeble parody of it. What we can do, however, is to make use of certain forms suggested to us by nature which will be really suitable to the positions they have to occupy, which will be pliable, that is to say, capable of being worked up into a continuous, evenly-distributed, and well-arranged design, and which will be besides all this very beautiful in themselves. Such idealizations from nature are the honeysuckle pattern of the Assyrians and Greeks; the wonderful stone carvings which fill mediæval churches, so renowned for the appreciation they reveal of the most subtle forms of birds, beasts, and flowers; the Persian designs for ceilings, textile fabrics, pottery, and paintings, unrivalled for intricacy of form without confusion, grace of line without weakness, and brilliancy of color without gaudiness; the flowing friezes of Renaissance times, so faultless in their curves.

There is another class of papers in which the main part of the pattern is geometrical. Papers of this kind are often very satisfactory, but do not usually possess as much interest as those involving free curves. They are, however, often very suitable to passages and halls, and may be used with advantage in places where something a little less monotonous than a plain surface of color is required. The geometrical patterns should always be small, never more than a few inches square, and should be simple also. Their want of interest tends to make them coarse and vulgar if used on a large scale. As a rule, it will be found that where figures involving squares are employed, it will be much better to place them with their sides vertical and horizontal, than with their corners at their highest and lowest points, like the diamond-shaped panes of glass in church windows.

ON the recent opening of the new building of the Kidderminster School of Art, Lord Lyttleton remarked that holding aloof from schools of art was short-sighted. If the trade of England was to compete with foreign trade, every thing possible must be done to instruct and educate English handicraftsmen in matters of art. To illustrate the need of this training he mentioned his having had the good or bad fortune to require a large carpet of peculiar shape for his house at Hagley, and finding great difficulty in getting one at all of the shape and character required. In the course of his inquiries he went into a large proportion of the carpet warehouses of London, and it struck him forcibly that English carpets were even now nowhere compared

with the Indian and Persian carpets. He saw no reason why a wealthy and intelligent country like England should not be able to compete with those Oriental workmen, many of whom were half savages, and there was every reason to believe that the new school of art would do much in that direction. Mr. Cowell, not wishing Kidderminster to be put down, replied that there was a craze for purchasing old carpets just the same as there recently was for buying up old china, and he had seen Oriental carpets exhibited in London show-rooms which were rotten with age, and yet had realized far more than a new and durable carpet would realize; but they had in Kidderminster designers equal to any in the world.

USES FOR FANCY CARDS.

THE pretty fashion of sending out to friends artistically designed cards on Christmas, New Year's, and St. Valentine's Day has led to many persons making collections of them as souvenirs. Prang and Marcus Ward this year have surpassed all their previous attempts in producing cards worthy of keeping, and the custom now bids fair to become very general among young people, and put a good deal of money into the pockets of these manufacturers.

Much ingenuity is shown in arranging these cards so as to show them off to the best advantage. It is getting to be the fashion to exhibit them on tables set apart for them; and at many entertainments the looking over and criticising of these cards have formed a great part of the amusement of the evening. In large families, where the cards were all arranged together for exhibition, the show was quite interesting. At one house, where they were particularly beautiful, and some very large, the lady has carefully sorted and arranged them on a table with a glass top, and intends them so to remain. The table is one of those originally intended for china and curiosities, which are to be found in so many houses, and in which it has lately been the fashion to show off photographs. Laid on velvet, kept in their places by small pins, these cards form a pretty and attractive collection, quite worth looking at. This year some of the cards have been accompanied by scented sachets for ties and handkerchiefs. The card (sometimes very large) is laid on the top, and attached by four bows of colored satin ribbon at the corners, or else edged with a satin ruche. One sachet received by a lady on Christmas-day was almost the size of a small sofa cushion, and the card on the top was nearly of the same size. At one side of the card was laid a folded lace pocket handkerchief, and on the other a fan in its case, each fastened by satin straps pinned to the sachet.

One of the best ways of showing the cards to advantage is in a standing screen, with, if possible, glass. If any one happens to possess one of those old-fashioned screens with a carved wood frame and a centre of old wool work, she can remove the work, put in a centre of stout cardboard, first covered with gold paper and then with the cards, on both sides, and two sheets of glass, and the collection is formed. A little taste is required for arranging them, and they must be all gummed on. A leaf of a folding screen shown to the writer the other day was prettily decorated with an edge of photographs of friends, and a centre composed of Christmas, New Year, and Valentine cards that those friends had sent. A wash of varnish protected them all.

Fancy card albums will probably soon become as fashionable as monograms once were, and even now some very elaborate collections are to be met with, put into pages that are made valuable by the talent and care lavished upon them, in the shape of design and execution. The albums are generally long-shaped ones, and the cards are selected and arranged according to design, those forming a set in a page to themselves. The date and name or initials of the sender, are put neatly above or underneath. An effective page can be formed by cutting out a piece of colored satin, a little smaller than the page it is intended for, turning in and gumming the edges, then when dry, laying it on the page, gumming it as neatly as possible, and adding a rim of gold paper all round the edge as a finish and to hide the gum marks. When it is all perfectly dry and flat, lay on the cards with strong gum, and press the whole under a heavy weight. This should be all carefully and neatly done. The satin background adds much to the beauty of the cards, especially the gilded ones. Many

pages can be varied in this way. Three hearts, cut out in gold paper, tied together by a ribbon bow, with a card in each, make a good design. Merely outlining with gold ink or color looks well. Some long narrow panels for going up the sides of a mirror in a small boudoir, looked very bright and uncommon with an arrangement of cards of various kinds. The panels were made of stout pasteboard, and were bound with dark blue velvet (which matched the mantel-board). The cards were laid one over the other, but not so as to hide their design, and were all varnished. One separate panel was particularly original, for it was designed in three large diamonds; in the centre one were some photographs, and in the others Christmas and other cards. The back of a piano that is turned to the room could be ornamented thus, the card-board foundation being cut to the required size, and the cards gummed on in a pattern. Diamonds of large dimensions, alternately of cards and either gold or colored paper, would be effective, the worst and least cared for cards being at the edge, and the ones to be cut into shape. At a recent dinner, the menu cards were Valentine cards of tasteful design, with paper gummed over the side on which the verses usually are, and the menu written on instead; one was put before the plate of each guest, and intended to be taken away as a souvenir. Each card had a different design at the back.

Decorative Art Notes.

The most fashionable fans in Paris are of feathers, small pheasant feathers, the golden or the Impeyan being the favorites, and the little wing-shaped parts of the bird's beautiful dress being laid closely one over another to form the regular series of parts. The effect is rich, though not equal to that of ostrich feathers, but the labor bestowed upon them is immense.

Neat covers for the old-fashioned square music racks can be made of embroidered mome cloth or serge, made in four sides and a top, with small ribbon bows at the corners. On the top "Music," with an ornamental wreath round, should be embroidered.

Some cleverly designed Easter cards, with drawings in outline to be filled in with color by amateurs, have been received from Messrs. S. W. Tilton & Co., of Boston. Directions for coloring accompany the designs.

Bed linen is now often embroidered, and the part of the sheet that turns back over the coverlet, and the sides of the pillow, are ornamented with some elaborate design carried out in satin stitch in white embroidery thread or flossette. The monogram is sometimes embroidered in a medallion in the centre of the work on the sheet, or on one side of the pillow. Ordinary white quilts look well with a spray of flowers worked in crewels.

Menus worked in silks on a silk foundation are now made in a new way. They have a cardboard frame the size of an ordinary menu card, and this is covered with silk, with a delicate floral design to one side; a second piece of silk-covered and worked cardboard is then sewn on just half the width—the design is on this half, and sometimes a small monogram; the card then slips in between these two pieces, half of it showing, and can be taken out to be examined and put back again easily. A little silk-covered rest is added at the back, so that the frame stands on the table like an easel. The whole is bound with a very narrow silk cord the color of the silk. Thus a fresh menu can be substituted at every dinner. Jessamine, forget-me-nots, or any small flower can be selected, and small mats can be embroidered to match to put the glass dishes and ornaments on, when arranged on a dinner table.

At a recent tea party at New Rochelle, N. Y., the ladies all wore old-fashioned samplers for aprons, upon each of which the legend, "Polly put the kettle on," was rudely inscribed over a freely conventionalized tea-kettle. The form of invitation was so clever that we reproduce it. The lines were enclosed in the design of a teapot. They were as follows:

We hope on Thursday next to see
A few young friends at seven to tea,
And trust that you'll at once agree
One of our honored guests to be.
Teacups and teapots rare have we,
Which you're expected, when you see,
To praise with proper ecstasy.
The teacups all belong to "E."
"I." owns the teapots. So you see
A sort of joint affair 'twill be,
Of Oolong, Hyson, and Bohea,
Teacups and teapots, "I." and "E,"—
Remember, then, that you're to be
On hand at seven P.M. to tea,
And share our modest little spree
On Thursday next. R. S. V. P.